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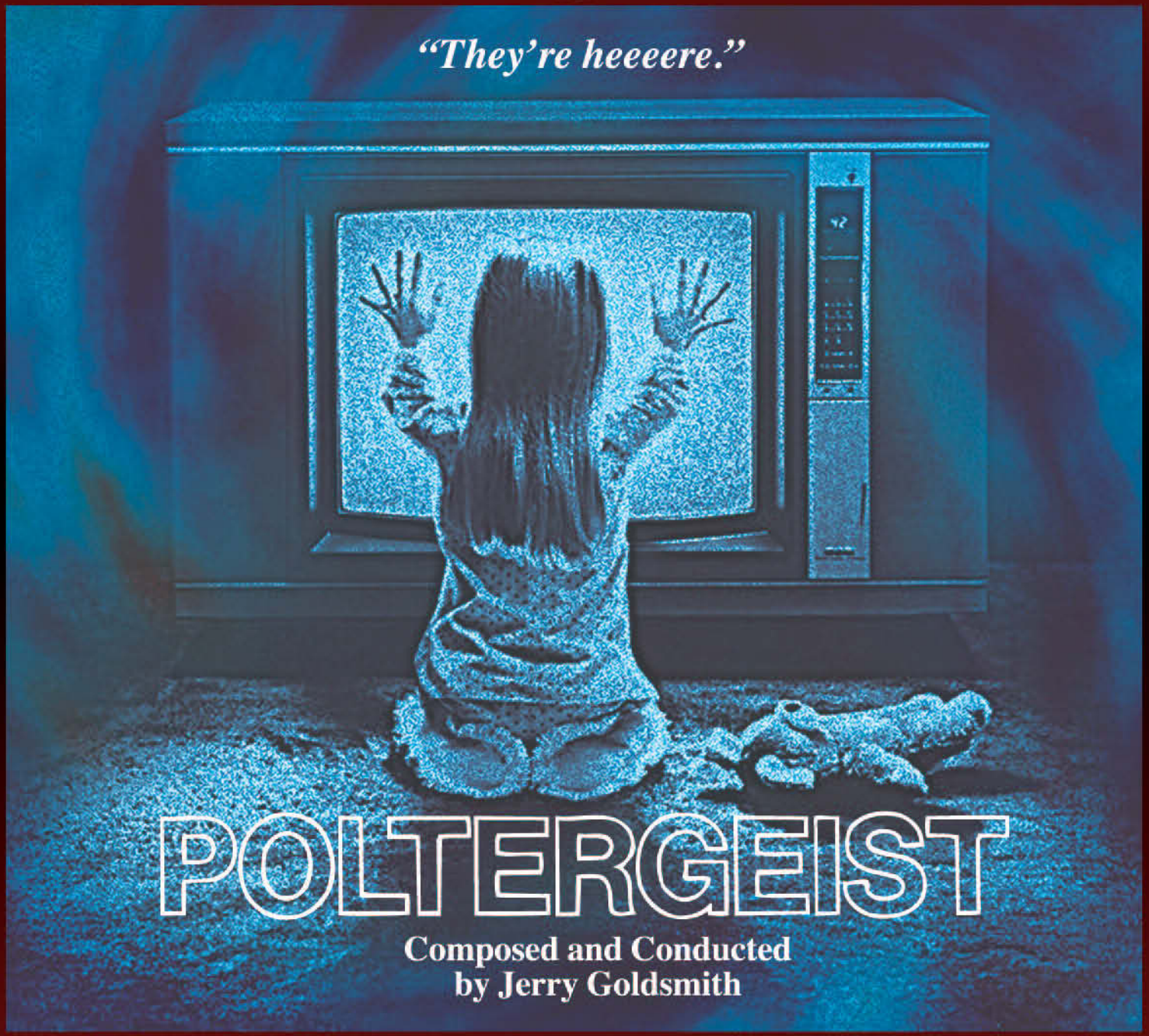


ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK

I have been an admirer of Jerry Goldsmith from the moment I heard his score for The Blue Max *and* A Patch Of Blue. *Along with John Williams, these two men have dominated the arena of great movie music for nearly 20 years. Jerry's scores range from the unforgettable* Patton *to his Oscar-winning music for* The Omen. *In between, there came such rousing challenges as* Star Trek—The Motion Picture, The Great Train Robbery, Chinatown, Papillon, Alien, *over 100 scores.*

Now with Poltergeist, *Jerry has met his greatest challenge—to scare us nearly to tears, and he has been remarkable in his efforts. Cleverly, the moments of greatest tension arise not from his brilliant off-rhythm ostinatos but more from a soothing tonal beauty.*

Don't trust his melodies. Something perfectly unworldly is due to occur the moment you let your guard drop and Goldsmith proceeds to feign and attack with no "apparent" rhyme or pattern. It's to his great credit that he has plotted every blow and designed a score of such shattering intensity that nighttime is perhaps not the right time to hear this album if you have seen the film. If you haven't seen Poltergeist, *Jerry's music conjures many classical impressions of ferocious drive and at the same time, cathedral beauty. So..let the imagination wander. Pleasant dreams.*

—Steven Spielberg

From liner notes for 1982 *Poltergeist* soundtrack.

POLTERGEIST

THE STORY

"They're heeeere."

Those two words, from Steven Spielberg's production of *Poltergeist*, entered the public consciousness almost immediately after the film's release on June 4, 1982. Uttered by little Carol Anne, the five-year-old girl who is the focus of attention throughout the movie, they initially referred to the ghosts haunting her house. It's a measure of the film's impact that they became, practically overnight, a part of the American lexicon.

Spielberg, then 34, was the filmmaking wunderkind who had already made the shark thriller *Jaws* (1975), the UFO epic *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* (1977), and the stunt-filled adventure *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* (1981). In 1981 he embarked on two movies at the same time: He would direct the touching science-fiction tale *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*, but cowrite and coproduce the lavish, special-effects-filled ghost story *Poltergeist*.

Dozens of movies had already touched on the spirit world, including such classics as *The Uninvited* (1944), *The Ghost And Mrs. Muir* (1947), and *The Haunting* (1963); some added humor to the mix: *Topper* (1937), *The Ghost Breakers* (1940), and *The Canterville Ghost* (1944). *Poltergeist*'s closest ante-cedent may have been a 1962 episode of television's *The Twilight Zone* called "Little Girl Lost," a frightening Richard Matheson script about a child who falls into another dimension and must be ferreted out by her distraught parents.

That, however, was not strictly a ghost story. *Poltergeist* was conceived as a scary excursion into the supernatural. With a story by Spielberg and a script credited to Spielberg, Michael Grais, and Mark Victor, *Poltergeist* concerned a Southern California family of five who are contacted by spirits waiting to cross over into the next world.

The setting is Southern California suburbia, a favorite Spielberg locale. Steve Freeling (Craig T. Nelson) is a successful real-estate salesman for the Cuesta Verde subdivision, which consists of dozens of look-alike tract homes, where he lives with his wife Diane (JoBeth Williams) and three children: Dana, 16 (Dominique Dunne), Robbie, 8 (Oliver Robins), and Carol Anne, 5 (Heather O'Rourke).

They wake up in the middle of the night to find that Carol Anne is talking to the TV set in the living room. No one pays much attention until things start to go awry in the house: kitchen chairs mysteriously arrange themselves atop a table, a room-shaking disturbance occurs, an ancient tree smashes into Robbie's bedroom window. Then the unthinkable occurs: Carol Anne disappears.

Although the rest of the family doesn't see it happen, we do. The adorable little girl has been sucked into a vortex of blinding light, and powerful wind currents transport her into the world beyond. Only when Robbie hears cries of "Mommy! Mommy!" emanating from the TV set does everyone begin to understand that the forces involved are beyond traditional scientific understanding.

Dr. Lesh (Beatrice Straight), a parapsychologist, arrives with her team to investigate. They are not prepared for the bizarre phenomena they witness in the Freeling home: beds spinning, toys flying around, an entire room in motion. Eventually they see and videotape the "poltergeist intrusion" that is plaguing the house and guess that Carol Anne — whose presence can still be felt — has been abducted by the spirits still in transition between life and death.

Lesh consults with a psychic named Tangina (Zelda Rubinstein), who determines that Carol Anne is among "souls not at rest, not aware that they have passed on.... They linger in a perpetual dream state, a nightmare from which they cannot wake." Together, the scientist and the mystic concoct a plan to rescue the little girl.

In an extraordinary special-effects sequence, Diane enters the next world, tethered by a rope that spans the dimensions, and retrieves Carol Anne. Although Tangina pronounces the house cleansed of evil spirits, the Freelings' nightmare is not yet over. While Steve is off making preparations to move the family elsewhere, the bedroom-closet vortex returns, nearly capturing Carol Anne and Robbie. Again, Diane rescues her children, but in a hair-raising finale, tombstones, caskets, and skeletons pop up all around.

It turns out that Steve's boss has built the entire subdivision atop an old cemetery, disturbing the sleep of the dead. The family speeds away to find lodging in a nearby Holiday Inn — and, in a final gesture of defiance (or nervousness), Steve shoves the portable TV set out of the room and onto the walkway outside.

"I took the premise that poltergeists are disembodied spirits or souls from people long since passed, who come back or who never left," Spielberg said in 1982. "In our film, they are spirits or ghosts who don't know they are dead, and who need a guide to take them into the next plane of existence through a gateway of spectral light. The terror is intensified with the notion that the phenomenon could happen to anyone."

Initially budgeted at $9.5 million, the film eventually cost $10.8 million to make. Most of the scenes were shot on three soundstages at M-G-M Studios in Culver City, California, with eight days of location shooting in Simi Valley, north of Los Angeles, necessary to establish the suburban setting.

Because Spielberg would be busy directing *E.T.,* he chose Tobe Hooper to helm *Poltergeist.* Hooper was then best-known for his grisly, cult-favorite horror film *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), although he had also made one of television's scariest miniseries, the four-hour *Salem's Lot* (1979), based on the Stephen King novel about vampirism in a New England town.

The issue of who actually "made" *Poltergeist* became the subject of controversy throughout production and, in the weeks prior to the release of the film, intense media scrutiny. Spielberg emphasized that he "designed" the movie via elaborate storyboards and involvement with camera setups (since he was on the set nearly every day), while Hooper maintained that he directed the film while collaborating in a normal fashion with the producer and cowriter, both of whom happened to be Spielberg."The creative force on this movie was Steven," insisted coproducer Frank Marshall who, with Spielberg, supervised all of postproduction, including editing, special effects, sound, and scoring by Jerry Goldsmith. Ultimately, Spielberg attempted to quell the controversy by writing an open letter to Hooper via a full-page ad in the Hollywood trade papers, claiming that "some of the press has misunderstood the rather unique, creative relationship, which you and I shared throughout the making of *Poltergeist.*

"I enjoyed your openness in allowing me, as a producer and a writer, a wide berth for creative involvement, just as I know you were happy with the freedom you had to direct *Poltergeist* so wonderfully," Spielberg wrote, thanking Hooper for "perform[ing] responsibly and professionally throughout."

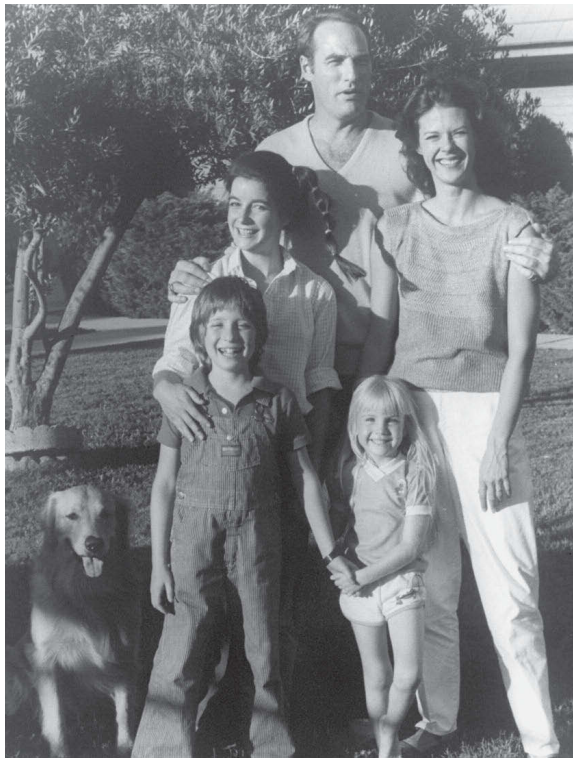
Still more controversy erupted when, a month prior to release, *Poltergeist* received an R rating from the Motion Picture Association of America's Classification and Rating Board based solely on the film's "intensity." Spielberg and Marshall appealed and won a PG rating.

The "intensity" that concerned the ratings board was due in part to the remarkable visual effects — more than 100 optical shots in all — created by George Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic operation. The skeletal hand reaching out from the TV set for Carol Anne, the ghostly visions that descended the stairs in the Freeling house, the strange creatures that menaced the children: many were created by ILM with then-state-of-the-art technology.

The visual effects credited to Richard Edlund, Michael Wood, and Bruce Nicholson were responsible for one of the film's three Academy Award® nominations. The other two were for soundeffects editing (Stephen Hunter Flick,

Richard L. Anderson) and the film's original score (by Jerry Goldsmith). In all three cases, *Poltergeist* lost to Spielberg's own *E.T.*

Critical reaction was largely favorable. *The New York Times* called it "a marvelously spooky ghost story...a film in which childhood wishes and fears are made manifest..a thoroughly enjoyable nightmare." The *Los Angeles Times* referred to it as "an epic bump in an apocalyptic night." *Time* found it "a riveting demonstration of the movies' power to scare the sophistication out of any viewer." *Newsweek* declared, "Spielberg's pacing is up to his highest tingle-and-jolt standard...*Poltergeist* works as a superior, spectacular ghost story." *New York* hailed it "a sensationally effective horror spectacle...the effects are luminous, exhilarating, fully imagined."



Poltergeist succeeded because it was wonderfully entertaining, offering satirical comment on contemporary society at the same time it scared the wits out of moviegoers. Wickedly funny moments about TV abound (from the family's skepticism about Carol Anne's "TV people" to the remote-control war being waged by next-door neighbors). Suburbia, initially depicted as a happy place to raise your kids, is poised at the gates of hell. Common childhood fears are magnified (a grinning toy clown turns menacing at night, a gnarled old tree becomes a shadowy threat during a thunderstorm). Ultimately, the strength of the family and the power of a mother's love for her children triumph over the forces of darkness.

In an article featured in the Los Angeles *Herald-Examiner* just before the film's release, Spielberg reminisced about his childhood, thinking specifically of a crack in his bedroom wall. "I remember lying there, trying to go to sleep," he said, "and I used to imagine little Hieronymus Bosch-like creatures inside, peeking out and whispering to me to come into the playground of the crack and be drawn into the unknown there, inside the wall of my home in New Jersey.

"*Poltergeist* is the darker side of my nature," he said. "It's me when I was scaring my younger sisters half to death. In *Poltergeist*, I wanted to terrify, and I also wanted to amuse — I tried to mix the laughs and screams together."

THE SCORE

For the music of *Poltergeist*, producer Steven Spielberg turned to composer Jerry Goldsmith. While Spielberg's friendship with composer John Williams was well-known, Williams had already been signed to score the director's *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*, which was also scheduled for release in the summer of 1982; and Spielberg, a film-music aficionado, had long been an admirer of Goldsmith's work.

In fact, Goldsmith was the ideal choice to create music designed to bridge this world and the next. Early in his career, he had been a mainstay of television's foremost fantasy series, *The Twilight Zone* (1959), and he received the first of his seven Emmy nominations for writing the eerie music for many episodes of Boris Karloff's *Thriller* (1960).

The composer had also scored many fantasy, horror, and science-fiction films in his then-25-year career in feature films. He won an Academy Award for his unsettling, choral-and-orchestral score for *The Omen* (1976) and won additional Oscar® nominations for *Planet Of The Apes* (1968) and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979). He wrote equally original scores for such fantastic tales as *The Mephisto Waltz* (1971), *The Other* (1972), *The Reincarnation Of Peter*

Proud (1975), *Damien: Omen II* (1978), *Magic* (1978), *Alien* (1979), and *The Final Conflict* (1981).

Born in 1929 in Los Angeles, he attended Los Angeles City College and studied with pianist Jakob Gimpel and composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco. He landed a job at CBS in 1950 and began writing scores for radio and live TV. By the early 1960s he was much in demand, eventually composing the themes for such now-classic series as *Dr. Kildare, The Man From U.N.C.L.E., Room 222, The Waltons, Barnaby Jones*, and *Police Story*.

Goldsmith scored his first feature in 1957, but it was his gentle Western score for *Lonely Are The Brave* (1962) that marked the beginning of his success as a composer for the big screen. His first Oscar nomination was for John Huston's *Freud* that same year, and he has received 15 additional nominations since then for such diverse films as *A Patch Of Blue* (1965), *The Sand Pebbles* (1966), *Patton* (1970), *Chinatown* (1974), *The Boys From Brazil* (1978), *Under Fire* (1983), *Hoosiers* (1986), *Basic Instinct* (1992) — and *Poltergeist*.

A key to Goldsmith's success is his ability to get inside the fabric of a film, discern what its essential sound should be, and translate that creative impulse into music that will

meet its dramatic needs. Sometimes his approach is sophisticated, sometimes it is simple; occasionally, as in *Poltergeist*, it is both.

Spielberg contacted Goldsmith about five months before the film went into production, the composer told *CinemaScore* in 1982. "I said I'd be very interested, so he sent me a script and I loved it," he recalled. Since director Tobe Hooper was not involved with postproduction, decisions about a musical approach to the material fell solely to Spielberg and Goldsmith.

"With Spielberg, probably more than any other director, there's a tremendous amount of discussion," the composer said. "He's very articulate about music, and one can discuss for hours about approaches. Anything I did was not of my own volition; it was a joint effort in that we both agreed what we were trying to do with the music for the picture. We wanted a childlike theme for the little girl. Steven felt that much of the action in the closet should have a quasi-religious atmosphere to it."

The composer described the thematic elements of the score as "very diverse. A very simplistic, childlike lullaby theme was one. Another theme was almost atonal in nature, another is very impressionistic in quality. It's diverse styles that all seem to mesh together very well.

"The dramatic content dictates the nature of the music," he explained. "I've done a lot of horror and supernatural pictures, but I don't consider *Poltergeist* a horror story at all. It's an old-fashioned ghost story, and there's only one horrifying moment in it, which is very brief."

The special effects posed a particular problem: the sequence involving the ghost descending the stairs, for example, was originally blocked out to be twice as long as it appeared in the film. So Goldsmith's music — already scored for the picture, without his having seen the footage — was trimmed during the dubbing process.

"Of course, you'd like to have it all there, visually," he said, "but Steven's very articulate and gave me very accurate interpretations of what it would look like visually. No one really knew what the monster was going to look like," he added. "There were various versions of it, and a lot of things that were supposed to be [in the film] were cut out. Some were lightened, some changed position. It was much later, after the music had been recorded, that the special effects started coming in, but that's what you're dealing with when you have special effects."

Goldsmith even drew on ancient musical sources for one moment in the score. He used a snippet of the plainchant "Dies Irae," from the traditional *Mass For The Dead*, in the climactic finale. "I thought I'd throw in a little inside joke there," he admitted, "since every composer from time immemorial has quoted that."

Films that indulge in fantastic imagery rely to an extraordinary degree on their music not only to involve the viewer, but also to lend an aura of credibility to the otherwise incredible events unfolding on-screen. In the case of *Poltergeist*, Goldsmith's score was crucial in establishing the quiet suburban locale, the innocence of the abducted child, the malevolence of the forces on the other side, and the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

Goldsmith wrote the music for *Poltergeist* — more than an hour in all — in December 1981 and January 1982. His longtime orchestrator, Arthur Morton, translated the composer's detailed, nine-line sketches into fully orchestrated pages for performance by a 76-piece orchestra and 16-voice choir. The first half of the score was recorded in two sessions on January 25 and 26, 1982; the second half on February 8 and 9, 1982, at M-G-M Studios in Culver City, California.

Several themes are intertwined in the score. The most familiar, and accessible, is "Carol Anne's Theme," a beautiful lullaby for the five-year-old at the heart of the story. Introduced when the child begins talking to the TV set, it is heard in its entirety only twice (during the main and end titles) but appears in abbreviated form throughout the film.

"The lullaby is quite effective in counterbalancing the harsh supernatural horror of the film's more energetic moments, contrasting an innocent children's tune with the roaring horror motifs," points out film-music scholar Randall D. Larson in his *Musique Fantastique: A Survey Of Film Music In The Fantastic Cinema.* (Goldsmith reprised Carol Anne's theme, but otherwise created an entirely new score for the 1986 sequel that featured most of the original cast.)

Secondary themes include a religious motif that emerges most audibly when Dr. Lesh explains the nature of "the light" in crossing over to the other side; a more jagged musical representation of the ghostly intruders, especially apparent during the "Night Visitor" cue; and others that range from an impressionistic view of the gnarled tree near the Freeling house to dark, grim sounds for The Beast during the most intense sequences of the film. Unlike many of his scores of the past 20 years, which have been liberally flavored with synthesized sounds, this one relies almost exclusively on the sounds of the traditional symphonic ensemble.

Complex and compelling, Jerry Goldsmith's music for *Poltergeist* not only served the film for which it was written — it remains a powerful listening experience apart from the images.

— Jon Burlingame

John Burlingame writes about film and TV music for The Hollywood Reporter*. He teaches film-music history at the University of Southern California and is the author of* TV's Biggest Hits/A History Of Television Scoring *published by Schirmer Books.*

Composed and Conducted by Jerry Goldsmith (except where noted).

Orchestrations by Arthur Morton.

Music Published by EMI Affiliated Catalogue, Inc.

Recorded 1/25/82, 1/26/82, 2/8/82, and 2/9/82 at M-G-M Studios in Culver City, California.

Original Album Produced by Jerry Goldsmith.

1. **THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER (1:30)**
   Composed by Francis Scott Key
   Public Domain
2. **THE CALLING/THE NEIGHBORHOOD (MAIN TITLE) (4:07)**
3. **THE TREE (OUTTAKE) (2:26)**
4. **THE CLOWN (5:12)**
   THEY'RE HERE
   BROKEN GLASS (OUTTAKE)
   THE HOLE (OUTTAKE)
   TV PEOPLE
5. **TWISTED ABDUCTION (6:56)**
6. **CONTACTING THE OTHER SIDE (5:10)**
7. **THE LIGHT (2:05)**
8. **NIGHT VISITOR/NO COMPLAINTS (9:07)**
9. **IT KNOWS WHAT SCARES YOU (7:37)**
10. **REBIRTH (8:23)**
11. **NIGHT OF THE BEAST (3:51)**
12. **ESCAPE FROM SUBURBIA (7:10)**
13. **CAROL ANNE'S THEME (END TITLE) (4:19)**

Album Produced by Nick Redman

Project Supervisor: Julie D'Angelo
Album Editing & Assembly Supervised by Michael Matessino
Digitally Edited & Mastered by Dan Hersch at DigiPrep, Hollywood, CA
Art Direction by Hugh Brown | *Design by* Aristide/NNP | *Design for WaterTower Music by* Dale Voelker
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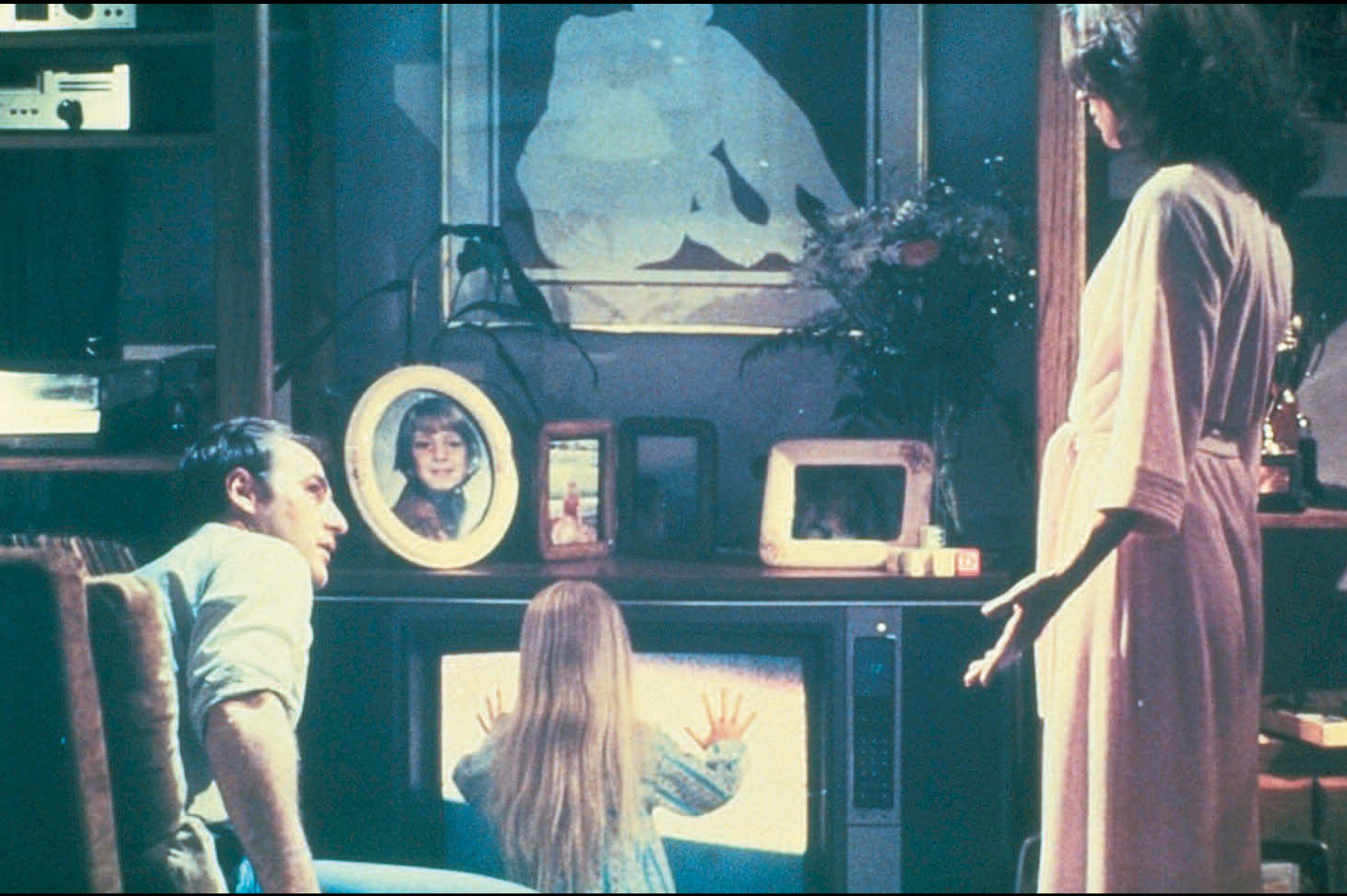

1. The Star Spangled Banner (1:30)
2. The Calling/
   The Neighborhood
   (Main Title) (4:07)
3. The Tree (Outtake) (2:26)
4. The Clown (5:12)
   - They're Here
   - Broken Glass (Outtake)
   - The Hole (Outtake)
   - TV People
5. Twisted Abduction (6:56)
6. Contacting The Other Side (5:10)
7. The Light (2:05)
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   No Complaints (9:07)
9. It Knows What Scares You (7:37)
10. Rebirth (8:23)
11. Night Of The Beast (3:51)
12. Escape From Suburbia (7:10)
13. Carol Anne's Theme
    (End Title) (4:19)

Composed and Conducted
by Jerry Goldsmith

Produced by Nick Redman

WATERTOWER MUSIC

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